Sustainable Luxury and Fashion: From Global Standardisation to Critical Customisation

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Abstract The concept of luxury is often linked to fashion. Even if those two terms have obvious different meanings, they both refer—in terms of goods and expenses—to the economic and cultural field of uselessness, excess, waste. Furthermore, in these years, a new element has been introduced to this relationship: distinction. Although we live in the age of global fast-fashion, distinction means nowadays creating a personal fashion, caring for the production processes, the workers' conditions, environmental issues and the material "history" of what one wears. In other words: sustainability. Therefore fashion becomes luxurious, not only economically, but also highlighting values such as uniqueness, customisation and wellness—the same values on which luxury is based. Fashion and luxury can thus create a new critical and ethical paradigm. This paper will focus on this new paradigm of luxury concerning fashion, the word "critical" referring above all to the concept of "choice". One can choose his/her clothes and can distinguish his/herself by taking care of the senses, of materials, of time. The first section of this paper will analyse how the concepts of fashion and luxury were defined and differentiated by Social Sciences at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (Sombart in Luxus und Kapitalismus. Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1913; Veblen in The theory of the leisure class. Macmillan, New York, 1899; Simmel in Psychologie der Mode. Die Zeit: Wiener Wochenschrift für Politik, Volkswirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Kunst 5 (54):22–24, 1895). The main aspect of this difference lies in the relationship with time of the two concepts: luxury is eternal and fashion is always changing. Then this paper will consider the critique of this "classical" differentiation operated by Fashion Theory—born in the last decades of the Twentieth Century as an autonomous field of research in Cultural Studies. The symbolic principles of modern luxury will be compared with the symbolic meaning of contemporary fast-fashion. The core of this paper is represented by the analysis on how fashion is rethinking its

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own patterns: from haute couture to the “fastest” brands, many fashion companies and designers are aware of ethical issues and sustainability, nowadays. Therefore sustainable luxury seems to be the only path for contemporary fashion culture and creativity. Finally, this paper will consider some examples as case studies, focusing especially on some new contemporary Italian fashion brands. One of these brands—Cangiari—will be analysed in detail as an ethical luxury brand, caring deeply for social commitment and sustainability.

Keywords Fashion · Luxury · Sustainability · Senses · Body · Reuse · Customisation · Ethics · Social commitment · Italian fashion

1 Fashion and Luxury: Shared Elements and Differences

The concept of luxury has often been linked to fashion, clothing and dressing. This link accompanied the history of the notion of luxury in the use of the word itself, in the laws that restricted it throughout the centuries (*leges suntuariae*), and in sociological, economic and cultural theories that defined its motivations and rules (Enzensberger 1997). Although luxury is not a synonym for fashion, as fashion is not luxury per se, these two areas have actually something in common. Luxury goods, expenses, luxury as display of conspicuous consumption—as Veblen (1899) defined it—all belong to the economic field of “uselessness” and excess. Food, clothing, jewellery, furnishings, and architecture are the branches which mostly fuel this field. Therefore fashion is entirely part of it (Calefato 2014).

Luxury has always been conceived as a fundamental element which favoured economically, socially and culturally the capitalistic mode of production since the beginning of its original accumulation phase. This hypothesis was supported by Social Sciences at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, during the crucial shift from the capitalistic mode of production of the Nineteenth Century to the accomplishment of mass production of goods, which occurred at the turn of the Century. Luxury symbolised then a specific case in the process of productive and communicative standardisation, and perhaps this was the reason of the amount of attention given by Social Scientists to this subject, in analysing its deep causes (Berry 1994; Borghero 1974).

Among those scientists, Sombart (1913) theorised the effective necessity of luxury. He underlined the wasting spirit of capitalism, as opposed to Weber (1904–1905), who highlighted the Calvinist strictness of this mode of production instead. According to Sombart’s analysis, the function of luxury for capitalism manifested itself through the complex transformation of lifestyles of both aristocracy and middle class during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. This transformation is due also to the fundamental contribution of women, both as a social role in everyday life, and as courtesans. Sombart maintains that upper middle class women fuelled the luxurious entries of consumption for the first time: textiles, furniture, clothing, food, toiletries, fashion accessories.

Sombart's analysis gives a global overlook of capitalism, and the fundamental role of fashion is highlighted through the leading role of textile industry in the European Industrial Revolution. Especially in Britain, the Industrial Revolution necessarily depended on the supply of raw materials from Asia. Sombart writes:

> It was toward the end of the Seventeenth and during the beginning of the Eighteenth Century that Indian cottons became the fashion among the rich and threatened home industries with serious competition (Sombart 1967: 123).

If it is historically true that the production of a system of social cohesion that we call "fashion" is intimately linked to "modernity" as the primal characteristic of European middle class societies (Paulicelli 2006), it is also true that this modernity, the birth of European middle classes and the constitution of Western capitalistic States and economies have fed themselves since their origins on raw materials, human beings and goods that other areas of the world supplied to Europe. The textile industry, for example—engine and basis for the very possibility to create a fashion—was born and strongly developed in Eighteenth century England in close relation with the rise of the British colonial empire. The "exotisms," "chinoiseries" and "japaniseries" have fed for centuries the refined tastes for clothes, porcelain, furnishing and tapestry in Europe and later in North America. In the same way, the slaves taken from Africa worked in American plantations to produce the cotton destined for the clothing industry.

In his *Theory of the Leisure Class* Thorstein Veblen introduces the concept of "conspicuous consumption". The notion of "leisure class" refers mostly to the upper middle class of his time, even if some characteristics, tastes and lifestyles plunged their roots in the previous Centuries. According to Veblen, a certain kind of consumption aimed to personal wellness gain a "honourable" function for those in society who can afford and show the possibility of enjoying it. The dress is one of the most prominent elements of this kind of consumption: "The need of dress is eminently a 'higher' or spiritual need" (Veblen 2007: 104). The function of fashion goes even further: the luxurious signs of clothing do not only show a conspicuous consumption, but also a conspicuous waste:

> The imperative requirement of dressing in the latest accredited manner, as well as the fact that this accredited fashion constantly changes from season to season, is sufficiently familiar to everyone, but the theory of this flux and change has not been worked out. We may of course say, with perfect consistency and truthfulness, that this principle of novelty is another corollary under the law of conspicuous waste (Veblen 2007: 106).

Also Veblen lingers on the relationship between fashion, luxury, and women, explaining how the conspicuous waste of fashion by leisure class women marks their social unproductiveness. The role of women as consumers, free from any kind of work form, is perfectly symbolized by her bulky dresses and by constrictive lingerie such as corsets:

> The corset is, in economic theory, substantially a mutilation, undergone for the purpose of lowering the subject's vitality and rendering her permanently and obviously unfit for work (Veblen 2007: 106).

2 Imitation and Distinction

In his famous 1895 essay—*Fashion*—Georg Simmel writes that fashion represents one of the best ways through which the fundamental tension fueling social life shows itself. In his opinion, the motivation of fashion resides in two typical characters of humanity: imitation and distinction. The former highlights the social dimension of culture, the latter, on the contrary, underlines the separation of the individual from the social group and remarks his/her individuality. According to these two polarities Simmel conceives fashion as a system for social cohesion which dialectically conciliates the individual's participation to a group, on one side, and his spiritual independence, on the other. Following fashion, substantially, does not undermine, for example, religious, spiritual or ethical beliefs of the individual, but controls and ratifies the bond between the individual and society through the adherence to an aesthetic, a taste, a common sense. According to this classic theory of fashion, which saw its accomplished manifestation during the first phase of mass society, imitation and distinction govern a top-down motion in the social pyramid. Distinction is a prerogative of upper classes, which are imitated by the masses in a trickle-down effect.

In the genesis of this phenomenon Simmel singles out a peculiar mechanism that regulates the relationship between his time's western civilisation and non-western ones. He writes that the more the origin of a fashion is exotic, the more the social group which adopts it will be cohesive:

> Because of their external origin, these imported fashions create a special and significant form of socialization, which arises through mutual relation to a point without the circle. It sometimes appears as though social elements, just like the axes of vision, converge best at a point that is not too near (Simmel 1904: 136).

In this sense Simmel introduces a particular idea of social distinction—actually related to fashion—as something around which the social cohesion of a group develops, but which cannot be received by the group itself. A fashion, writes Simmel, belongs only to a part of the group, while all the rest goes towards it; as soon as everybody does what was done by few at the beginning, the fashion stops being a fashion. Every increase drives the fashion to its death because it obliterates diversity; the charm for novelty is therefore also a charm for transitoriness (Simmel 1904: 139).

Simmel writes that fashion has a peculiar relationship with time: a relationship which has "the attraction of a simultaneous beginning and end, the charm of novelty coupled to that of transitoriness" (Simmel 1904: 139). According to Simmel, women find in fashion the possibility of combining imitation and distinction and personal significance, features that were denied to them in other matters:

> In a certain sense fashion gives woman a compensation for her lack of position in a class based on a calling or profession (Simmel 1904: 145).

In the end, according to Simmel:

> the peculiarly piquant and suggestive attraction of fashion lies in the contrast between its extensive, all-embracing distribution and its rapid and complete disintegration (Simmel 1904: 155).

This definition approaches two concepts that bind fashion and luxury, even contradictorily: "all-embracing distribution" and "disintegration". Luxury, as fashion, tends to being limitless trough time in its forms and symbols, but it is also built on the ideas of waste, squander, disintegration. Fashion and luxury are therefore akin and, at the same time, opposed. Akin because the laws of fashion are founded on the paradox of making mandatory the unnecessary, the groundless, that which appears as waste and unreasonable consumption. Opposed because fashion is constantly changing, while luxury is basically eternal.

The notion of luxury is much older than the one of fashion (Calefato 2003). The former travels through the history of diverse ages and social formations, while the latter reaches its full appearance only in middle class society. In fact, only after the French Revolution the "citizen" could use fashion as a symbolic device to participate both to the rights of equality and the prerogatives of distinction. As an example, the middle class male dress, as Barthes (2006) observes, has fundamentally democratic origins. After the French Revolution, the idea of democracy gave birth to an idea of male dress—which lasted substantially unchanged until the Twentieth Century—originated from military uniforms and from the values of equality which mirrored the fracture with the *ancient régime*, even aesthetically. Barthes writes:

> the great movement within masculine dress towards standardization and democratization launched by the Revolution and inspired in form by reference to the austerity of Quaker dress, was bringing about a whole revision of vestimentary values; seemingly *déclassé*, clothing could signal social distinctions only via a new value, namely that of *distinction* (Barthes 2006: 23).

Distinction as a social phenomenon characterises the birth of fashion in modernity. It is indeed difficult to obtain into the communal and democratic dimension of the idea of taste on which the inner workings of fashion are founded. In the tension between distinction and taste as common sense, Barthes singles out the birth of the aesthetics of the detail:

> the knot on a cravat, the material of a shirt, the buttons on a waistcoat, the buckle on a shoe, were from then on enough to highlight the narrowest of social differences (Barthes 2006: 66).

The detail is a pivotal element of one of its most peculiar expressive forms: dandyism. Fashion, in its accomplished social meaning in mass society, stands opposite the dandy, because the distinction of the dandy is elitist, while in fashion distinction is in a dialectic tension with imitation. As Barthes writes:

> Fashion is the collective imitation of regular novelty; even when it has the alibi of individual expression, or, as we say today, of a 'personality', it is essentially a mass phenomenon in which sociologists are happy to be interested so long as they find in it the privileged example of a completely pure dialectic between the individual and society (Barthes 2006: 68).

3 Luxury According to Fashion Theory

Fashion Theory arises as an independent branch of research of social sciences and humanities in the last decades of the Twentieth Century. It conceives fashion as a cultural form, therefore—from the academic point of view—it is part of the diverse constellation of Cultural Studies. Fashion Theory analyses the characteristics of fashion in relation to aesthetics, semiotics and critical discourse, as tightly bound to everyday life and body representations. Luxury is also analysed through this cultural perspective, both by referring to the classic sociological theory as previously outlined, and to the analysis of the typical symbolical forms of luxury nowadays.

According to Fashion Theory luxury does not only concern wealth but the actual embedding of values such as quality, rarity, lasting strength, craftsmanship and customisation in the objects, especially nowadays. In order to better explain this concept we can refer both to the etymology and to the semiotic quality of the word "luxury". The words which are used in the most common Western European languages—luxury, luxe, Luxus, lujo, lusso—derive from the Latin word *luxuria*, *-ae*, which referred to exuberance, even in the field of lasciviousness, and excess (Bataille 1967): traces of this meaning can be found in the use of the adjective "luxuriant" (in reference to a garden). Tacitus uses the expression *eruditus luxus* meaning "fine taste in the expenses": the squandering of monetary wealth relates to the cultural quality of the expenses themselves. Another Latin word with the same spelling, *luxus*, is used as an adjective, which derives from the past participle of the verb *luxare* and shares its Indoeuropean root with the ancient Greek verb *λύω*, meaning "to melt". From the same root derives the Italian word *lussazione* (dislocation), an interruption, an interjection of something through something else, that sometimes occurs to articulations. Words acquire their meaning from their usage through time and memory: so, even if these concepts refer to two different semantic fields, luxury and *lussazione* seem much more related than ever nowadays. Luxury is indeed represented by objects, attitudes, images, styles that—sometimes symbolically—interrupt the serial progress of life and *lussano* (dislocate) the habits.

Contemporary luxury, bearing this cultural and qualitative dimension, differs from the traditional concept of opulence, conspicuous consumption, ostentation of wealth. Luxury still represents excess, overabundance, unrestrained flux, but the key concepts that best define and circumscribe it are: uniqueness, rarity, distinction, eternity, time, space, worth, wellness. These concepts establish the qualitative dimension of luxury, understating the ostentation, which gradually disappears through the subtraction of signs that can relate to the idea of *sprezzatura* so

perfectly described in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528). Contemporary luxury contains the motives which Georg Simmel related to distinction more than a Century ago: something appealing to the relationship between the individual and the hazard of exception, the challenge of waste and of everything that disregards the law of usefulness and functionality. On the one hand, luxury evokes the idea of eternity (Lipovetsky 2003), meaning defying the concept of death itself, because it remains and survives through time. On the other hand, luxury shows itself through images of foolish waste, of desire exceeding the needs, of "priceless" worth.

"Price" is based, indeed, on a common agreement, on a negotiation, on an "average" value of an object, set by a community (Benveniste 1969). "Worth", on the contrary, deals with an intimate dimension, referring to the qualitative aspect of an object or a good, far—as much as possible—from its own "consumer's goods" nature. This is why this word is often used also referring to people. Worth is not bound to practical use or functionality, to mere wealth and market value, but to charm, to myth (Barthes 1957), to the even fetishistic value of an object, to its "appreciation" in terms of additional values. Valuable goods are often appreciated because of their uselessness. They are cherished because of their incredibly high price—symbolically, not necessarily economically.

Space is a further key word in the mythologies of contemporary luxury that narrate just how little space there is in the world today. The space you can see from the top of a tower in the middle of an overcrowded city is equal to dominion over that world, in the happy individualism conjured up by the image of home, albeit a temporary one, as ephemeral as stocks and bonds for a junior broker. The typical medley of streets and houses in the Nineteenth century Paris inspired Benjamin's reflections on the collective dimension which the dialectic between street and home represented for mass society:

> Streets are the dwellings place of the collective. The collective is an eternally unquiet, eternally agitated being that - in the space between the building fronts -, experiences, learns, understands, and invents as much as individuals do within the privacy of their own four walls (Benjamin 1982: 423).

The opposite of this collective dimension, the value of space in exclusive luxury homes in the contemporary metropolis, is based instead on the happy isolation of the new elites (Frank 1999). In this sense luxury is indeed space, though it is not a deserted space, as we can see from the image of the apartment (with five bathrooms) on the 54th floor of the Trump Tower, from whose windows you can look far down on the bright lights and bustle of the world below. An ease that takes shape in the enormous interval luxury places between world and home.

In *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) Simmel notes how money allows men to create the distances, boundaries and privacy that allow them to survive in the traffic and reciprocal pressures of modernity. For Simmel this distance is enhanced by the fact that personal wealth consists of means of production and not consumer objects, as in primitive cultures, and so various intermediate stages separate the proprietor from the ultimate goal of possession (Simmel 1978: 76). Today personal wealth and life style are based entirely on these intermediate stages, which are of the nature of signs, and of which luxury represents the quintessence.

Contemporary luxury activates the awakening of the senses and of intellect, of pleasure and reason. This kind of luxury features two apparently synonymous concepts, which actually differ from each other: uniqueness and rarity. What is "unique"? Not even a product of art, nowadays, for ours is the age of mass production and reproduction of art, where even its "aura" is reproduced and sold. Nor a designer dress or accessory is "unique", since the designer label itself is a serially reproducible sign, globally recognised. Therefore the uniqueness of luxury cannot be separated from the idea of "rarity", a concept—in opposition to "unique", which always refers to artefacts—related to natural goods or an object created or modified by natural or temporal elements.

4 A New Idea of Distinction

During the Twentieth Century, fashion favoured the element of imitation, through which the image of the clothed body serialised, until it became standardised. At the same time, fashion changed the way with which it spread through social classes, overturning the trickle-down movement to its opposite—bubble-up movement—, from the bottom to the top of the social pyramid. This movement characterised the influence of different "styles" and "subcultures" on many fashions, starting from the Sixties. "Style" emerges as an element of rupture of Simmel's principle about mutual independence of fashion and "individual spirit". According to Dick Hebdige's essay *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979)—on British subcultures, especially punk—style embodies the strongest form of aesthetic and ethic submission to a way of life, not only to a fashion. Since the end of the Seventies styles have influenced fashions; even those which Hebdige presents as independent subcultures—contrasting the "institutional" culture and fashion—have been incorporated. Prêt-á-porter, casual, "young" fashion, punk-inspired couture of the Eighties and Nineties (Gianni Versace above all, Versace and Calabrese 1993) are the aesthetic and industrial results of this influence.

At the turn of the millennium, distinction arouse again in fashion as a sort of reaction to standardisation (Bourdieu 1979). One of the first answers of the fashion industry to this demand of distinction was "fast-fashion", according to which its production does not follow the traditional, slow, seasonal rhythm of prêt-á-porter, but it is based on fast consumption needs, low-cost. The stores upgrade their stocks every ten days or every two weeks, choosing their new items according to the preferences of their buyers. This fast-fashion system, typical of the biggest retail multinational corporations, is nowadays the standard for the textile-clothing mode of production.

In order to keep a fast pace of production, low-cost brands (as most of the biggest fashion brands, anyway) exploit sweatshop labour from underdeveloped countries and areas in Europe, Asia and Africa. The 2013 tragedy at the Rana Plaza

in Bangladesh—the collapse of a building harbouring many illegal textile plants—saw the death of more than one thousand workers, or the same year fire in a warehouse near Prato, Italy, where seven Chinese immigrant workers died, are gruesome examples of the unspoken true cost of fashion.

Many millions of people all over the world work in this branch, enduring terrible working conditions—very low income, non-existent security, incredibly long working days. *The True Cost*, a 2015 documentary by American director Andrew Morgan, explains who actually is paying for the low-cost of globalised fashion, and how this kind of production on these condition is already unsustainable.

The fast-fashion standard, ideally and culturally, does not represent at all the ethical dimension of fashion which the consumers are demanding. Furthermore, it is nowadays incorrect speaking of "consumers", especially in fashion: it should be better keeping in mind that, as time goes by, individuals emerge as crafters of their own fashion and taste, disregarding common sense, through a daily DIY routine where everyone defines and adapts his/her own style. Therefore, the need for a fashion which respects other values—such as politics, culture, environmental awareness—grows stronger and bigger. With these concepts as staples, a different quality of the concept of "distinction" is arising in the last few years: the search for adjusting clothes and objects to the personal and intimate idea of body and individual wellness, for a profound and synergetic relationship between the clothing, the senses and a "slow" time.

Fashion has always been related to time, it is time per se, indeed. The Italian word for fashion, *moda*, evokes in its own etymology the idea of "modernity"; fashion lives in an eternal present, foreshadowing an eternal future, always facing towards the newest change. However, Walter Benjamin writes that fashion is also the form through which the present manages to do a "tiger's leap" into the past (Benjamin 1968: 261). Contemporary forms of reproductions of fashion signs seem to confirm and reinforce this image: fashion nowadays uses the past as a huge supply of images and quotes which come back to the present with new meanings. The forms of this throwback are vintage, revival and reuse: through these, the system of fashion allows us to recover and rework the objects and the signs left behind. This is particularly relevant especially for the current age, in which the fragmentation of life seems to have erased the past as memory. Rearrangements, contaminations between past and present incorporated by fashion fill the emptiness of this fragmentation, and give opportunities to memory once more, under the form of an individual and unique style. The demand for an "interior" dimension of fashion grows increasingly, in order to regain an emotional and ethical value as opposed to one representing an economic or social status.

In this sense, fashion goes beyond itself, and luxury does the same. Luxury is based nowadays on wellness as "well-being", as opposed to "being wealthy". As Mathieu and Monneyron write:

> We should also add the environmental concerns which, due to their interest on sustainability, strongly pose to the living the existential questions proper to luxury. (Mathieu and Monneyron 2015: 68).

The relationship of luxury with time, the idea of eternity and lasting quality that characterise it, recall immediately the issue of cultural and actual sustainability of global social reproduction. There cannot be luxury without sustainability. There cannot be fashion outside its ethical dimension. Luxury and fashion will survive only if they will make critique and awareness their founding grounds. The word "critique" means "choice": the one embodying the production, exchange and consumption of "well-made" goods. Awareness means knowing the raw materials, knowing the people that worked in the production, knowing how much the environment and the workers have been respected in order to create that piece which is bought or admired in a beautiful shop window. Actually, it is life itself at stake.

5 Ethics, Critique, Sustainability

"Life" is one of those words which are imbued with positive shared values, not needing any explanation for that: its mere pronunciation discloses merry images in our minds, not always as authentic as we would like, such as ones of a healthy planet, a happy baby, an always shining hope. The Italian translation of this word—vita—inspired the Los Angeles based fashion designer Amanda Shi in the naming of her eco-friendly fashion brand—Avita—by juxtaposing an "a" to it. The brand is eco-friendly because it incorporates the philosophy of ethical and sustainable clothing: its core idea is producing nice pieces of clothing using only natural raw materials, in order to contribute to a long and happy life for the planet. Bamboo, recycled cashmere, organic cotton and soy are the main raw materials for Avita's collections, in order to produce "clean" textiles and pieces of clothing which are able to rouse, in fashion and luxury industry, the knowledge of "life" meaning making a better world.

Can a dress give happiness and favour life? An affirmative answer is difficult, if fashion is a synonym of ephemeral values—the fashion of the moment, the aim for seduction of the one for taking part to a social clique because of a particularly exclusive brand. No effort at all, the opposite of it, indeed: this connotation of fashion lets us drift in the flow of common sense, of imitation, it stimulates at most ostentatious competition. The target of sustainable fashion and luxury are, on the contrary, making taste, desire for ostentation and even narcissism ends in themselves, but elements of the ideal effort for a better world, from a militant point of view. Being aware of what we use as clothing, we could feel involved in the essential quest on how to preserve the environment and protect human rights.

A very large number of clothing brands take part to this ideal current, nowadays. In the branch of sport shoes, for example, the French brand Veja's products are made with organic cotton from Tauà—a small Brazilian village where eighty-nine families live with their organic agriculture. WornAgain, of the Terra Plana group, is inspired by recycle, in fact it recycles many raw materials for their shoes, never adding chemicals or GMOs. Or the old German brand Zeha—which made the shoes for East-Germany athletes before the fall of the Berlin Wall—relaunched its

production in 2003, exploiting the vintage cult of *Ostalgie* for objects and symbols of the old DDR, paying attention to a sustainable production in its plants in Slovakia.

There is a search for luxury in terms of quality, as opposed to appearance. A further example fort this is the Italian brand Relight-up, founded in 2008 through a relighting project—as in its name—on power sources, materials and lifestyles of our world: an idea perfectly symbolised by the windmill blades of its logo. Organic cotton, seaweed, corn and soy are the raw materials of its eco-friendly and (by now) limited edition T-shirts and sweaters. The motif of limited edition comes from the philosophy of luxury, in casual fashion which does not allow a casual choice on clothing, but demands awareness.

The designer-artist Patrick Lafrontière is also part of this ethical fashion branch, trying to introduce new concepts and ideas in a world for too long ruled by the ephemeral. Born in French Guiana, Lafrontière's raw material is the bark of palm trees, inspired by the modalities of invention of the objects of his country's everyday life. His works are unique pieces that resemble sculptures, and his runways look like a gallery or a museum.

The quicker and more hectic the pace of fast-fashion, the more relaxed and responsible is the time of slow-fashion, as it is perfectly highlighted by the artisanal branches of luxury. One of the most important brands of Italian knitwear, Loro Piana—acquired in 2013 by LVMH—expresses its company philosophy by telling how its products are made and for what they are made. The manufacturing is artisanal, the raw materials are collected respecting populations and animals, the quality of their products is perfect, their lasting power is almost eternal, they are simple and understating, and this is the reason of their luxury value. Luxury and moderation, almost frugality, seem to touch each other in this philosophy involving fashion, consumption cultures and lifestyles.

The ethical, environmental and fair values are the core of the notion of luxury nowadays. The "humanistic entrepreneurships" are the leaders of this new idea, joining sustainability, knowledge of the materials and respect for the workers. Another famous Italian cashmere brand—Brunello Cucinelli—considers its workers, its locations and its quality the core of the company, giving one third of its profits to the workers—who already earn a higher salary than the average of the branch—, one third to the territory and one third to the entrepreneur.

The capital cities of world fashion have also been recycled towards sustainability, and they host events supporting ethical fashion, aside the official ones, such as the Milan based *So critical so fashion*, taking place since 2013 during the Milan Fashion Week. Eco-friendly and quality targeted independent brands, fashion designers, artisans, industrial designers, creative and valued tailoring studios can show their products in this event. And all over the world many cities become capital cities of fashion because they are the centre of this productive movement: Sao Paulo in Brazil and Dakar in Senegal are the meeting points where huge social and cultural energies headed towards sustainability grew, in two continents which have been exploited for a long time and widely, such as South America and Africa.

6 Sustainability as Culture

In 2012 the Italian *Class* magazine and its publisher Class Editori, in occasion of their 25th anniversary, organised an international exhibition at the Triennale of Milan, whose title was *C25 Options of Luxury*. The exhibition showed 250 select objects, signs and concepts which expressed the qualities and the complex features of contemporary luxury. Next to high-end jewellery and five stars hotel and resort franchises, the exhibition chose as symbols of luxury some natural goods, such as the Sicilian Bronte pistachio and Trapani sea salt. This example shows how the idea of luxury is nowadays a necessity, whose founding base is completely different from the past. If luxury is bound to the ideas of uniqueness, rarity, eternity, it has the duty of protecting unique, rare or endangered goods. Rarity, and therefore luxury, deals with life and death because often it is caused by depletion and the wearing effect of time. Therefore rarity is a challenge to nature and life itself and requires a consideration on time, which also becomes a supporting value of luxury. Luxury must have an allure of eternity and endless lasting of the objects and even of the people who embody it. And yet, right here its contradiction is unveiled through waste and excess, which also define luxury and corrode the signs in a moment or in a season (Curcio 2005).

In this sense, we are living nowadays neither the age of "the end of luxury" nor what trend forecaster Li Edelkoort calls "the end of fashion" (Edelkoort 2015). Fashion and luxury in the classical sense of the Twentieth Century have certainly come to an end, but both are enduring a rebirth in the terms of sustainability, customisation, distinction, culture. As Gardetti and Muthu write:

Sustainable luxury is the return to the ancestral essence of luxury, to the thoughtful purchase, to the artisan manufacture, to the beauty of materials in its broadest sense, and to the respect for social and environmental issues (Gardetti and Muthu 2015: IX).

Dana Thomas highlighted in her 2007 book how the most important brands "switched off the luster of luxury" in the last years of the Twentieth Century, on the contrary we can maintain that nowadays fashion is reevaluating luxury as a cultural value. As British journalist Lucy Siegle writes, the fashion brands have started the "second act of luxury", and they did it exactly in the name of sustainability. Siegle cites many cases: Tiffany and Co., for example, one of the founding members of I. R.M.A. (Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance), takes its raw materials only from mines whose supply chains are traceable. Kering, François-Henri Pinault's luxury holding, imposed many sustainability targets to its brands, among them: the attention to the locating of raw materials, paper and packaging; the decrease of water and waste consumption; the decrease of the emissions of carbon monoxide, dangerous chemicals and other materials; control on suppliers; an aware development for new professionalisms. Siege cites also Livia Firth, creative director of London-based agency for environmental consulting Eco-Age, who works with some of the most renowned fashion brands and who founded in 2012—along with Siegle herself—the Green Carpet Challenge project, using her film industry

connections to persuade Hollywood celebrities to use eco-friendly fashion. Firth worked also with Lanvin and Stella McCartney, the most prominent brands of the Kering group, in order to restructure the supply chains, from silk to leather.

Siegle writes:

> Sometimes it is worth convincing an entire generation of producers of the worth of joining sustainability, in order to access a profitable and growing market, as happened for Gucci zero-deforestation handbags. It is a matter of reconsidering the artisanal tradition, and leading it into the present. The attention is all on those luxury brands which are composing this scenario. Those are the forerunners of the famous "turning point" that we are impatiently waiting (Siegle 2015).

Certainly, Siegle—one of the executive producers of *The True Cost* documentary—emphasises the positive value of the prominent brands of sustainability in the luxury industry, while stigmatising low-cost fashion as founding on complete negligence, or better on the extreme exploit of raw materials and workers, in order to obtain a low-cost final product and fast production. It is also true that, after all those criticisms towards them, even some low-cost brands are now promoting the awareness for materials and production conditions in their systems. Among these brands, Swedish brand H&M has been promoting since 2011 the H&M Conscious project, based on values such as recycling, ethics, awareness the responsible exploit of natural resources. On these values H&M founds its production policy and its marketing, aiming to making even the customers more responsible.

Although their ethical and critical engagement, luxury goods are still exclusive. On the contrary, low-cost fashion increased enormously the number of fashion consumers: actually everybody can afford clothing, now (Giannone and Calefato 2007). Low-cost is therefore a form of sustainability of fashion, as it is for tourism, furnishing and healthcare. One exemplar case of low-cost in the sense of social sustainability is the 2013 declaration of Indian Supreme Court on the right of the local industry of producing generic drugs against cancer. These drugs cost one tenth of the "branded" one, produced by the pharmaceutical corporation who held the exclusive until then, and who wanted to keep it. Therefore an ethical revolution—necessarily producing added value—even in low-cost production is welcome, in order to create a sort of "cultural luxury", accessible only to aware customers and producers. Luxury can become "democratic" only as culture.

The resources whose endangerment is constantly increasing are not only natural resources: culture can be one of the most neglected branches of economy; often, when governments have to cut down public expenses, the first ones suffering these cuts are those destined to museums, libraries, monuments archaeological sites and cultural heritage in general. In the last years some fashion brands invested in culture differently than the traditional sponsorship of cultural enterprises. Luxury brands actually built up cultural enterprises: Foundations. Cartier was the forerunner of this trend, and its 1984 established Foundation, in Paris, supports art through acquisitions, exhibitions, publishing, sponsorship to young artists. After it Benetton in Treviso, Montblanc in Hamburg, Trussardi in Milan, Pinault in Venice are just some of the many examples. Famous for their bond with architecture are Louis

Vuitton—its Paris headquarters are designed by Frank Gehry—and Prada—whose foundation was established in 1993 and it actually built a cultural pole in Milan in 2015 by reconverting an old distillery. The Prada Foundation project is by Rem Koolhaas, an architect whose long term collaboration with Miuccia Prada is well known (Koolhaas 2001), and it represents one of the most interesting examples of luxury in the meanings of culture, spaces, and redevelopment of peripheral neighbourhoods. It is also very interesting to note how the café—a place usually considered as "trivial" as opposed to the "sacredness" of a museum—gained in this case a peculiar dignity: The Bar Luce of Prada Foundation was indeed designed by director Wes Anderson, who recreated there the atmosphere of a typical bar of Milan in the Sixties. In the case of Foundations luxury rediscovers its primordial elements of gift and culture—art, architecture, design, cinema, photography—as a social value. As journalist Renata Molho writes: "the new frontier of luxury cannot ignore responsibility, gratitude, and giving back" (Molho 2016: 52).

7 Cangiari

At the 2013 Paris Fashion Week a new Italian Calabria based brand, whose production is entirely based on social enterprises—Cangiari—debuted in the international fashion scene. It is a symbolic and particular example of sustainable luxury: in fact Cangiari is by now the first eco-ethical high-end fashion brand in Italy. It produces handcrafted textiles, most of them weaved on a manual loom, a technique increasingly exploited by the brand. The aim of the brand is creating high-qality clothing on the one hand, while re-updating the ancient tradition of Calabrian weaving, which roots into Grecanic and Byzantine cultures. Combining this traditional weaving with research and innovation, the brand creates unique products with a tailored finish.

Cangiari belongs to the 2003 founded GOEL Cooperative Group, which comprehends many social enterprises of the Locride and the Gioia Tauro Plain, in the Reggio Calabria province. Its base in Southern Italy is extremely relevant, even if Cangiari has a promotional branch in Milan and its supply network is expanding especially in Northern Europe. The mission of GOEL Group is in fact changing Calabria and give value to local communities. The actual name GOEL has a biblical etymology and its meaning in ancient Hebrew is "the liberator", "the redeemer". The ethical engagement for redemption and change are represented also by the name Cangiari itself—meaning "to change" in Calabrian dialect. Calabria is one of the many Southern Italy regions which endure a structural disparity in comparison to the Northern ones: this is due to the centuries-old *Questione Meridionale* (southern issue), which was deeply analysed by Gramsci (1975), among many others, during the years of his imprisonment as an antifascist. After the Second World War, the economic policy of the Italian institutions and, later, the precisely focused interventions of the European Union tried to solve this issue, but they never accomplished the task completely. Especially Calabria is still nowadays a

land of poverty and emigration. Furthermore the activities of the local racquet, ‘*ndrangheta*, deeply control territory, economics and politics.

Cangiari supply chain and production, therefore, has a highly valued cultural, political and social meaning, because the enterprises of its network rebel to the criminal control of territory and economics. GOEL Group actively opposes to ‘*ndrangheta* by reporting to the authorities its activities and actually showing that the best answer to criminality is social engagement and work quality. The network of local artisans which are involved in the Group is also committed to the inclusion of impoverished people and lower social classes.

The GOEL network of enterprises safeguards its environmental sustainability by overseeing all its production chain, from hand-weaving to communication. The textiles and the organic dyes are accurately certified and controlled in order to ensure the best environmental care and the well-being of the customers. Thanks to the direct control of the production chain, its clothes can be highly customised, too.

Together with Cangiari, GOEL Cooperative Group oversees many other activities in the fields of responsible tourism, organic farming, local development, marketing and communication, social and healthcare services. The Group also founded a farming cooperative, GOEL Bio, which reunites many businesses who experienced attacks by ‘*ndrangheta*.

The GOEL strategy for change is based on a twofold action: giving actual and emancipating answers to the needs of people and offering cultural offers for change to the territory through its entrepreneurship. The Group’s philosophy is founded on the idea that ethics cannot be only just anymore, but it has to be also effective.

In December 2015, the brand presented in Rome a runway show in collaboration with Action Aid: in this occasion the principles of sustainable fashion were exhibited to the public, supported by the participation of *The True Cost* director Andrew Morgan. This initiative represented an example for how fashion nowadays goes beyond fashion itself, since the exhibition of the dresses on the runway was only a part of a bigger cultural enterprise. In the same month Cangiari released also a bridal dresses collection named “The Ethical Bride”, dedicated to those women who want to live their wedding day coherently with their aesthetical and civil convictions.

Vincenzo Linarello, president of the GOEL group, declared:

> You cannot ignore what is behind some glittering fashion products, you cannot, no more. It is unacceptable to consider “beautiful” a garment which enslaves workers, devastates the environment and damages the health of the wearer. If fashion is not ethical, it is horrible, monstrous, and who signs the garments coming from these circuits underwrites the shame behind them.

Nothing more conclusive could be said on the sustainable present and future of luxury and fashion.

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[1]All accessed 30 March 2016.